

Reading through the contributions it is striking that a number of text passages from the *Liezi* are taken up in several essays as evidence for various, sometimes quite diverging, arguments and analytical approaches. Apart from Dippmann, who once refers to the other editor Littlejohn's diverging interpretation of the same phenomenon, we do not find any cross-references to, or discussions of, diverging interpretations of the same passages, which indicates that the authors were not aware of each other's research. We hope that this rich new contribution to *Liezi* studies will inspire further scholars to engage in a discussion with the various new perspectives on the *Liezi* presented in this publication.

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PETER LORGE (ed.):

Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.

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This book is a collection of seven articles on the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, a less than popular period for historians of imperial China. Two factors largely explain the neglect: first, the limited number of source materials, especially compared with the abundance of official documents and private texts from the Tang and Song dynasties, increases the difficulty of inquiry. Second, the Five Dynasties era is relatively short and multi-polar to the point of impeding the sort of analytic patterns that appeal to most historians. Even though the Tang–Song transition has drawn some recent attention, the period between the two dynasties is usually considered anomalous or irrelevant.

Peter Lorge targets this book at the academic reader, the introduction and concluding chapter emphasizing the importance and meaning of the Five Dynasties period. These two chapters successfully demonstrate that what we identify today as Song culture had evolved gradually by integrating northern and southern elements, while showing how the lack of central authority produced momentum to create a new culture with local traits.

The remaining six articles cover various topics, but fall roughly into three categories. Naomi Standen and Johannes Kurz separately discuss the historical evaluation of political figures: Zhao Dejun in the north and Han Xizai in the south. Traditional historians criticized Zhao for disloyalty to the state, while Han was seen as a talented and ambitious official whose aims were thwarted by material distractions. Standen and Kurz both criticize later historians for imposing their own values on these men, while failing to appreciate the circumstances under which they lived and made critical choices.

Hugh Clark and Ruth Mostern write about local politics, although they employ different approaches. By analysing the origins of new leaders in the southern regimes, Clark demonstrates that the upheaval of the late Tang produced circumstances that empowered scoundrels to vie for political power. In as much as their primary concern was personal benefit, such leaders were not the sort of Robin Hood nobles that some writers allege. Mostern analyses local administration by describing the gradual transition from a highly militarized Tang system to the

civilian order of the early eleventh century. Developments in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms periods, she argues, played a key role in that process.

The third cluster of chapters centres around art history. De-nin Lee and Tracy Miller used tomb paintings and architectural styles to identify regional characteristics, significantly changing our appreciation of tenth-century art. Lee studies a Kitan tomb in Inner Mongolia and argues that archaeologically excavated materials can vastly expand our knowledge of Chinese painting, in contrast with the linear narrative of famous painters common today. Miller, by studying temple constructions in Shanxi and comparing them with south-eastern examples, identifies regionally distinct styles of the tenth century that informed Song architecture.

Through such interdisciplinary co-operation, *Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms* demonstrates that this period offers many potentially interesting paths for further research, whether by re-reading traditional texts in new ways or making use of an ever-growing body of archaeological findings. However, the diversity of topics serves in some ways to thwart the stated aims of the editor, namely, “treating the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms as a heuristic unit”. De-nin Lee refers to the period as one of disunity and confusion, but treating it as a “heuristic unit” seems to imply the opposite, an artificial coherence. Peter Lorge’s conceptualization of the period fosters our understanding of the process by which Tang culture and society assumed Song forms. But the Five Dynasties period does more than help us measure the degree of historical change between Tang and Song, it contains greater symbolism for the macro history of imperial China. In addition, the differences between the “northern dynasties” and “southern kingdoms” deserve more attention and merit a rethinking of the historical characterization of Zhao Dejun and Han Xizai. Both figures had changed their political loyalties, but Song historians mostly criticized Han for a luxurious lifestyle, his political loyalties being less of a problem compared to Zhao. This difference is related not only to their different political careers, but to their circumstances more generally. In the north, where political leadership changed more frequently, the issue of “loyalty” was more crucial than in the south, which experienced significant economic progress mainly due to political stability. The luxurious lifestyles of top officials made possible by economic prosperity thus drew the attention of historians looking back on the southern kingdoms. The value judgements of Song historians were subjective in advancing their didactic mission, but they also reflected a contrast in historical realities or perceptions of reality. Thus, considering tenth-century regimes as a single unit might run counter to the common practice of modern historians, who stress regional diversity.

After the traditional structures which underlay Tang government and society collapsed in the late ninth century, China fell into disunity for over half a century, before reunification under the Song. To my mind, research in the Five Dynasties period affords us the opportunity to overhaul the superficial characterizations of traditional historiography. For example, it was during this period that the women of official families engaged more in public affairs, and the attitudes of governments towards political legitimization evolved in ways that differed from both Tang and Song. Appreciating the full complexity of changes in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period is likely to interest historians for some time to come.

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